

BEACON HILL a walking tour



provided by the New England Chapter
Society of Architectural Historians

BEACON HILL: a walking tour

Although Boston's first settler, Rev. William Blaxton, established his residence on the south slope of what is now Beacon Hill in the late 1620's (plaque on 50 Beacon St.), these highlands remained relatively rural until the late 18th Century. Beacon Hill, or "Tramount," was the most prominent topographical feature on the Shawmut Peninsula, its three peaks being Cotton Hill to the east, Sentry or Beacon Hill, and West Hill or Mt. Hoardam (later Mt. Vernon), all of which were subsequently reduced in height. The General Court ordered a "beacon" erected on Sentry Hill in 1634-35, hence the name. By 1645 most of Beacon Hill (then the "New Field") had been divided into pasture lots. In 1722 there were about 60 houses in the area, primarily on the southeast slope of Cotton Hill.

The first but unsuccessful attempt at real estate development began ca. 1729 on the north slope, with Nathaniel Byfield laying out several streets between Myrtle and Cambridge along with 89 house lots. It was not until the 1790's, however, that mechanics of all sorts began erecting their own mostly frame houses north of Myrtle Street.

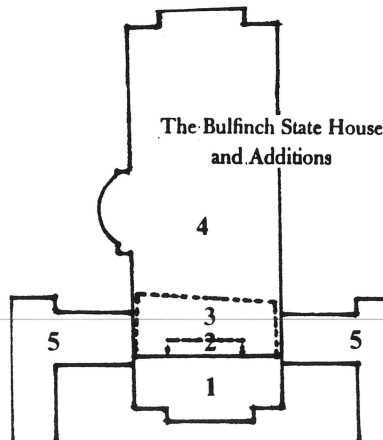
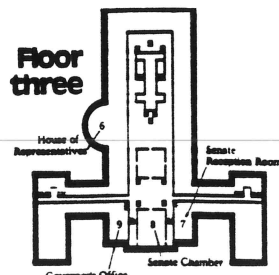
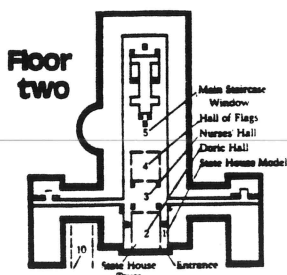
South slope development was initiated by a syndicate known as the Mt. Vernon Proprietors (Jonathan Mason, Harrison Gray Otis, Benjamin Joy, Hepsibah Swan) who purchased most of the land between Beacon Street and the Myrtle Street ropewalks, and from Joy Street to Cambridge Bay, from John Singleton Copley and others. An April 27, 1796 plan shows Olive (Mt. Vernon), Chestnut and Walnut Streets laid out along with 13 large "Diverse House Lots" advertised in the COLUMBIAN CENTINEL of August 3, 1796. In 1814 about 40% of the land contained a mix of brick row and mansion houses, and by 1840 virtually all available lots were filled, including Louisburg Square, laid out in 1826.

A number of the buildings have been subjected to additions and alterations: added stories, dormers, mansards, oriels, etc. Beginning in the 1890's tenements replaced many of the row houses on the north slope. In recent years numbers of the houses have been converted to apartments. The south slope became a state historic district in 1955, north slope in 1963.

THE TOUR: From the Park Plaza Hotel walk north on Arlington Street to the gates of the Public Garden, opposite Commonwealth Avenue. Turn right, proceed through the Garden and across Charles Street into Boston Common. Follow the path diagonally to the left until it meets the path parallel to Beacon Street, bear right, follow the dotted line on the map.

BEACON STREET (east part 1640, named 1708)

opp. State House: Shaw Memorial, 1897, Augustus St. Gaudens, sculptor: Chas. F. McKim, arch't;
Col. Robert Gould Shaw & 54 Regiment of black troops, 1863 battle
22 (9-10 Park St.) Amory-Ticknor House, 1804, enlarged 1805-6, Charles Bulfinch, arch't
20 Claflin Bldg., 1884, William G. Preston, arch't
16 Chester Harding House, 1808, blt by Thomas Fletcher
14 Congregational House, 1897-98, Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, arch'ts; Norcross Bros, bldrs
10-1/2 Boston Athenaeum, 1847-49, Edward Clarke Cabot, arch't; expanded 1913-14, Bigelow & Wadsworth, arch'ts; private library founded 1807; gallery & floors 1&2 open to public
9-5:30 M-F, 9-4 S; SAH tours 2&3 PM Th&F Mar. 29,30
19-25 Hotel Bellevue, 1899-1900, Peabody & Stearns, arch'ts; add. 1925, Putnam & Cox, arch'ts;
site of Gov. James Bowdoin mansion
Massachusetts State House, 1795-98, Charles Bulfinch, arch't; plus additions; open M-F, tours
10-3:30 (Doric Hall); enter main portico



1. Designed by Charles Bulfinch, the Massachusetts State House was begun in 1795 and opened early in 1798. The government of the Commonwealth moved to it from the smaller State House which had been, for more than sixty years before the American Revolution, the seat of Massachusetts' colonial government. Like its predecessor, the State House of 1795 is today one of Boston's most famous historic landmarks—a distinction which does not interfere with its longstanding and continuing usefulness as the capitol of Massachusetts.

2. The first addition to the State House was built in 1851 to provide four fireproof rooms for the records and papers of the Commonwealth. Designed by Isaiah Rogers, the addition was built out from the central part of the north facade of Bulfinch's building. It was 94 feet long, 85 feet high and 85 feet wide. A single row of windows, set in recessed arches, and a balustrade along the flat roof line, relieved the upper part of the Bulfinch building which rose behind the addition.

3. The second addition, designed by Gridley J. F. Bryant and built 1853-56, provided better accommodations for the State Library and other departments. Rogers' addition of 1851 was kept at its original roof height, making a well for light and air; the upper part of the original north front of Bulfinch's State House looked down on it, as before, and Bryant's four-story addition rose around it and above it on the other three sides.

4. Charles E. Brigham designed the extension to the north which is in use today. Begun in 1889 and completed in 1895, it is built of yellow brick with gray trim. Both the Bryant addition and the Rogers addition which Bryant had modified and used as part of his enlargement were demolished to make way for the extension.

5. Built between 1914 and 1917 of white Vermont marble and of granite, the east and west wings frame Bulfinch's State House. The architects of the wings were William Clayman, R. Clifton Sturgis and Robert D. Andrews.

BEACON STREET (cont'd)

- 33 1824-25, Cornelius Coolidge, arch't; for John Hubbard; later res. of Harvard Med. School; Prof. George Parkman murdered by Prof. John W. Webster, 1850's
- 34 1824-25, Cornelius Coolidge, arch't; for John Hubbard
- 34-1/2 Tudor Apts., 1885-87, Samuel J.F. Thayer, arch't; site of 1834 Israel Thorndike mansion, sold to ship owner Robert Gould Shaw (grandfather of Col.) 1838 & later to Frederick Tudor, Boston "Ice King"
- 1 Walnut St., 1804, Charles Bulfinch, arch't(?) for John Phillips, Boston's first mayor; son Wendell Phillips, abolitionist & reformer, born here
- 39,40 Appleton-Parker Houses, 1817-19, Alexander Parris, arch't; 39 for Nathan Appleton & 40 for Daniel Pinckney Parker; 3rd floor 1888, Hartwell & Richardson, arch'ts; Fanny Appleton & Henry Wadsworth Longfellow married in 39 in 1843
- 41 1838-39, blt by David Sears for son-in-law George C. Crowninshield
- 42 1819-21, Alexander Parris, arch't, for David Sears who added 43 in 1832; carving by Solomon Willard; Somerset Club since 1871, added 3rd floor; site of Copley's house
- 44 1832, blt by Harrison Gray Otis for his daughter
- 45 3rd Harrison Gray Otis House, 1805-6, Charles Bulfinch, arch't; Otis lived here from 1806 to death in 1848; originally surrounded by gardens, now American Meteorological Society; open to SAH 1-4 Th&F, Mar. 29,30
- 46 1805, Samuel Sprague, bricklayer; Eben D. Jordan (Jordan Marsh) occ. 1866-95, enlarged, new facade; E.D.J., Jr. occ. 1898-1916, acquired 47 in 1913, added facade & joined with 46; elaborate interior spaces
- 54,55 1807, Asher Benjamin, arch't, for Jas. Smith Colburn; 55 home of historian Wm. Hickling Prescott 1845-59; now Mass. Hq. of Col. Dames; tours on 1/2 hr. 1-4, Th&F, Mar. 29,30,\$2.50
- 56,57 1819, Ephriam Marsh, housewright
- 61 after 1817, Peter Banner, arch't(?)
- 63,64 1821,1824, Ephriam Marsh, housewright
- 66 1890, McKim, Mead & White, arch'ts
- 70-75 1828, Asher Benjamin, arch't, blt by the Mt. Vernon Proprietors
- 76 1906, A.W. Longfellow, arch't, for Mrs. O. Iasigi

CHARLES STREET (laid out 1794, widened to west 1920)

7-17 pre-1814

CHESTNUT STREET (laid out 1799)

- 76-70 1828, Cornelius Coolidge, bldr
- 68 1828, Lincoln & Stoddard, housewrights
- 66 1827, Lincoln & Stoddard, housewrights
- 64,62 1826 (rebuilt; orig. 1817,1811, Lincoln & Stoddard, housewrights)
- 60-50 1824, John Hubbard, housewright; 50 Francis Parkman res.; 52 Ralph Adams Cram res.
- 61 1825, Bela Stoddard, housewright & occupant
- 59 1824, Bela Stoddard, housewright(?)
- 57A 1827-28, Harvard Musical Ass'n (founded 1837) since 1892
- 57 1828, for Samuel Snelling
- 55 1829, Cornelius Coolidge, bldr
- 53,51 1828, Benjamin & Hiram Bosworth, housewrights
- 49,47 1827, 1930, Lee & Leighton, housewrights
- 45,41,39 1827-29, Cornelius Coolidge, bldr
- 48 ca.1822, Ephriam Marsh, housewright(?), for Hepsibah Swan
- 42 1808, John Howe, owner
- 37 1824
- 29A 1802, Charles Bulfinch, arch't(?); bow ca.1820; purchased by Edwin Booth, actor, 1883
- 29-27 1917-18, Bellows, Aldrich & Holt, arch'ts, divinity school chapel, now condos
- 25,23 1809, Jeremiah Gardner, housewright
- 20,18 1823, Cornelius Coolidge, arch't; blt by Abner Joy & Stoddard & Lincoln
- 16 1822-23, blt by Hepsibah Swan as her residence
- 14,12 1822, blt by Hepsibah Swan
- 17 1808, Charles Bulfinch, arch't, for Hepsibah Swan (see passage way to rear garden)
- 15 1807, Charles Bulfinch, arch't, for Sarah Swan
- 13 1806, Charles Bulfinch, arch't, for Christiana Keadie Swan "free & exempt from control of husband"; 13,15,17 - "daughter houses" for Hepsibah Swan's daughters

CHESTNUT STREET (cont'd)

- 11-7 1824, Cornelius Coolidge, arch't, blt by John Hubbard
- 3,1 1822, Ephriam Marsh, housewright
- 8,6 1804, Chas. Bulfinch, arch't(?), for Chas. Paine; orig. with side yards
- 10,4 ca.1821, Cornelius Coolidge; blt in side yards of 8,6
- 2 1803

WALNUT STREET (laid out in 1799)

- 8 1811-12, blt by Uriah Cotting; sold to Nathaniel P. Russell 1814
- 10,12 1811-12, blt by Ebenezer Francis for investment
- 14 1802, John Callender, owner; granite retaining wall 1821

MT. VERNON STREET (east end 1640, Joy to Charles 1796, called Olive, Mt. Vernon 1832)

- 34 1822, blt by John Callender
- 32-28 1822, blt by heirs of John Joy
- 26 1838, blt by Thomas Perkins for daughter Mrs. F.C. Loring

JOY STREET (10' way from Common 1661, to ropewalks 1715, to Cambridge St. 1769, Joy St. 1855)

- 6 1824-25, Alexander Parris, arch't(?), blt by George W. Lyman (China & West India trade, cotton, railroads), occ. to 1880 (also occ. "The Vale" in Waltham 1839-80); to daughter Lydia, wife of Rob't Treat Paine II (R.T. Paine House in Waltham), added 18 Mt. Vernon ca.1882; remained in Lyman/Paine family to 1943

MT. VERNON STREET

- 31-35 1829-30, blt by Col. Amos Binney (occ. 31), U.S. Navy Agent 1812-26; outfitted frigate Constitution for War of 1812; 35 occ. by son Dr. Amos, noted zoologist
- 37 pre-1820
- 49 1803, blt by Stephen Higginson Jr.; expanded by Mass. Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw 1831
- 53 1804, Charles Bulfinch, arch't, blt by Jonathan Mason
- 55 1804, Charles Bulfinch, arch't; now Rose Nichols House Museum, MWS 1-5, \$3.00 admission
- 57 1804, Charles Bulfinch, arch't; blt by Jonathan Mason; expanded 1838 by Cornelius Coolidge; later occupants Daniel Webster 1817-19, Charles Francis Adams
- 59 1837, Edward Shaw, arch't, for Adam Wallace Thaxter; later occ. Thomas Bailey Aldrich
- 61-65 site of 1802 Jonathan Mason mansion (Bulfinch)
- 63,67-83 1836-37; 77 now Club of Odd Volumes
- 40-42 1850, George M. Dexter, arch't, blt by Augustus Hemmenway
- 44-48 1820's
- 50-60 1804-5; blt as stables for Swan houses 13-17 Chestnut; later artist studios (Maurice & Charles Prendergast); dwellings 1920's
- 64 1810, blt for John Trecothick Apthorp, President of the Boston Bank
- 66 1810, Jeremiah Gardner, housewright
- 70-72 1847, Richard Upjohn, arch't; double mansion for John & Nathaniel Thayer; later Boston University Theology School; condos 1965
- 76,78 1811; speculative
- 82,84 1822
- 85 2nd Harrison Gray Otis House, 1800-2, Charles Bulfinch, arch't; entrance changed 1850's, west bow added 1882
- 87 1805, Charles Bulfinch, arch't; sold to Stephen Higginson Jr.

LOUISBURG SQUARE (planned 1826)

- 1,3 1846-47; 3 occ. by Joseph Iasigi, Smyrniote Armenian merchant & ship owner; firm Iasigi & Goddard responsible for much of Boston/Smyrna trade 1836-72; donated statue Aristides the Just to Square in 1850
- 5 1842
- 7,9 1835
- 11-17 1836
- 19 1834; 15-19 St. Margaret's Convent (1881-1890); chapel 1882, Henry Vaughan, arch't
- 22 1835, Jesse Shaw, housewright

LOUISBURG SQUARE (cont'd)

20-14 1836; 20 Jenny Lind's wedding 1852
 12,10 1835; 10 occ. by Louisa May Alcott with father Bronson as tenant
 8 1835, bld by Phineas Upham, sold to Andrew Fearing
 4,6 1842, Jesse Shaw, housewright; 4 occ. by William Dean Howells in 1890's
 2 1847

ACORN STREET

1-8 1828-29, Cornelius Coolidge, bldr(?)

WEST CEDAR STREET (laid out by Nathaniel Byfield 1729, named West Cedar in 1826)

1-4,6,8,10,12,14,16,18 1827, John Hubbard, housewright
 7 1833-34, Asher Benjamin, arch't(?), Oliver Downing, housewright & occupant
 9 1833-34, Asher Benjamin, arch't & occupant, Oliver Downing, bldr(?)
 11 1835, James Garland, housewright

MT. VERNON STREET

123-125 Charles Street Meeting House, 1807, Asher Benjamin, arch't; bld as Charles St. Baptist Church; offices & apt 1982

WEST CEDAR STREET

22 1830's, Melzar Dunbar, housewright
 23,25 1836, Asher Benjamin, arch't(?), Melzar Dunbar, housewright
 27 1834, Bela Stoddard & Micah Cutler, housewrights, for Theodore Baker
 29 1834, Stoddard & Cutler, housewrights(?), for Abijah Johnson
 36 1828, Cornelius Coolidge, bldr, for Dr. George Parkman
 42 ca.1841, bld by Benjamin Rogers
 Remainder built up by 1850; housewright Oliver Downing & land owner Kirk Boott active between Pinckney & Revere Streets

REVERE STREET (laid out by Nathaniel Byfield 1729, called May Street to 1855)

85,83 Bellingham Place, 1846-47, Hiram K. Towle, bldr, for Ralph W. Holman; plan 1843
 79 Sentry Hill Place, 1843, Daniel Copeland, bldr; called May Place 1844
 73 Goodwin Place, 1858, bld by William F. Goodwin, painter

ANDERSON STREET

45 Champney Place, 1845

REVERE STREET

29 Rollins Place, 1843-44, John W. Rollins, bldr; wood portico not a house

MYRTLE STREET (laid out 1737, named 1806)

site of Austin's ropewalk, late 18th century

JOY STREET

Joy Court
 36,40 ca.1830-40, bld as communal stables
 46 Abdiel Smith School, 1834; first black school in Boston; now Museum of Afro-American History (information on Black Heritage Trail)

SMITH COURT (called May's Ct. 1812, named Smith Ct. 1848)

3 1799, bld by Wm. Lancaster & Benajah Brigham; blacks first became tenants ca.1825-30
 5 ca.1815-28; purchased by George Washington, a black laborer, in 1849

SMITH COURT (cont'd)

- 7 ca.1802-11
- 7A 1799; double house
- 10 1853, blt for Joseph Scarlett
- 8 African Meeting House, 1806, Asher Benjamin influence; blt for African Baptist Society; oldest standing black church in US; became a synagogue in 1904; acquired by Museum of Afro-American History 1972, recently restored

JOY STREET

- 74 1862, Police Station #3; now Hill House

CAMBRIDGE STREET (laid out as "highway 12' wide" 1647, named Cambridge 1708, widened 1960's)

- 141 1st Harrison Gray Otis House, 1795-96, Charles Bulfinch, arch't; now SPNEA house museum & archive; open T-S 12-4, tours on hour \$3
- 131 Old West Church, 1806, Asher Benjamin, arch't

HANCOCK STREET ("newly laid out way called George St." 1731, Turner St. 1736, Hancock St. 1788)

- 11-23 ca.1808
- 20,22 1805; 20 home of Senator Charles Sumner 1830-67
- 31-37 1859, Jonathan Preston, arch't(?)
- 57 ca.1870, William Washburn, arch't

DERNE STREET ("13' way next Beacon Hill", Hill St. 1788, named Derne St. 1806)

- 2-6 ca.1846
- State House addition, site of 1849 Beacon Hill Reservoir

BOWDOIN STREET (laid out 1727, called Middlecott St., extended to Beacon 1791, Bowdoin 1824)

- 35 Church of St. John the Evangelist (Cowley Fathers), ca.1831, Solomon Willard, arch't(?), blt for Dr. Lyman Beecher's Bowdoin St. Congregational Society; interior altered by Henry Vaughan, Ralph Adams Cram et al.
- 11-33 ca.1843-45

JOY STREET

- 23,21,17-9 pre-1814
- 24-18,10,8 pre-1814

PINCKNEY STREET (laid out 1803)

- 5 after 1786; blt & occupied by Louis Clapion, a French mulatto hairdresser & George Middleton, a black horsebreaker; acquired land in 1786
- 9(9-1/2),11 1824, blt by Benjamin Russell; tunnel leads to 9-1/2, 3 houses + courtyard
- 17 1800, blt by Robert Wood; sold to Gridley J.F. Bryant, arch't 1856, who probably added embellishments
- 12-38 subdivided by Jonathan Mason ca.1827
- 12,14 ca.1830, Lincoln & Stoddard, housewrights; Joseph Lincoln occupied 12
- 16 1828, blt by Ebenezer Nichols
- 18,20 1827, blt by Frederick Hughes; 20 occupied by Bronson & Louisa May Alcott
- 22 1838, Cornelius Coolidge, bldr(?)
- 24 1802; Jonathan Mason's stable; remodeled ca.1884, William Ralph Emerson, arch't
- 21 1801, Susanna Benjamin, owner; altered after 1824
- 25,27,33,37 pre-1814
- 47,49 1804, Jeremiah Gardner, carpenter & Peter Osgood, bricklayer, bldrs & owners
- 51-65 pre-1807
- 48-54 early 1830's
- 56 1833, blt by William Snow
- 58-66 1845-46, Gridley J.F. Bryant, arch't(?); blt by Samuel Hooper; rear of 85 Mt. Vernon lot cor. Pinckney & Anderson St., English High, 1824, now condos

PINCKNEY STREET (cont'd)

74-1/2 by 1834, Joshua & Benjamin Turner, housewrights, for Thomas Haskins; "hidden house"

BRIMMER STREET (south portion 1828, north portion 1866)

- 2-18 1868, blt by Silas Merrill
- 20-24 1868, Daniel Davis, owner
- 5 1888, Henry Savage, arch't, Seth Baker, owner
- 9 1867, F. Wainwright, owner; later Admiral Richard E. Byrd
- 15 1884, S.E. Tobey, arch't, E.L. Clark, owner
- 17 1882, Sturgis & Brigham, arch'ts, Robert Codman, owner
- 19,21 1869, Snell, Gregerson, arch'ts, Mary Wales, owner
- 29 1881, Bradlee & Winslow, arch'ts, C. Faulkner, owner
- 33-39 1869, Snell, Gregerson, arch'ts, for various owners
- 41 (165 Mt. Vernon St.) 1869, Ware & Van Brunt, arch'ts, Charles E. Ware, owner
- 30 Church of the Advent, design begun 1875, blt 1878-92, John Hubbard Sturgis, chief arch't, Charles Brigham, collaborator; also R. Clipston Sturgis, Henry Vaughan, Ralph Adams Cram, Bertram Goodhue; Sir Ernest George, Harold Peto

BEACON STREET

- 84 1911, Ogden Codman, arch't, for Bayard Thayer; "Cheers" Pub in basement

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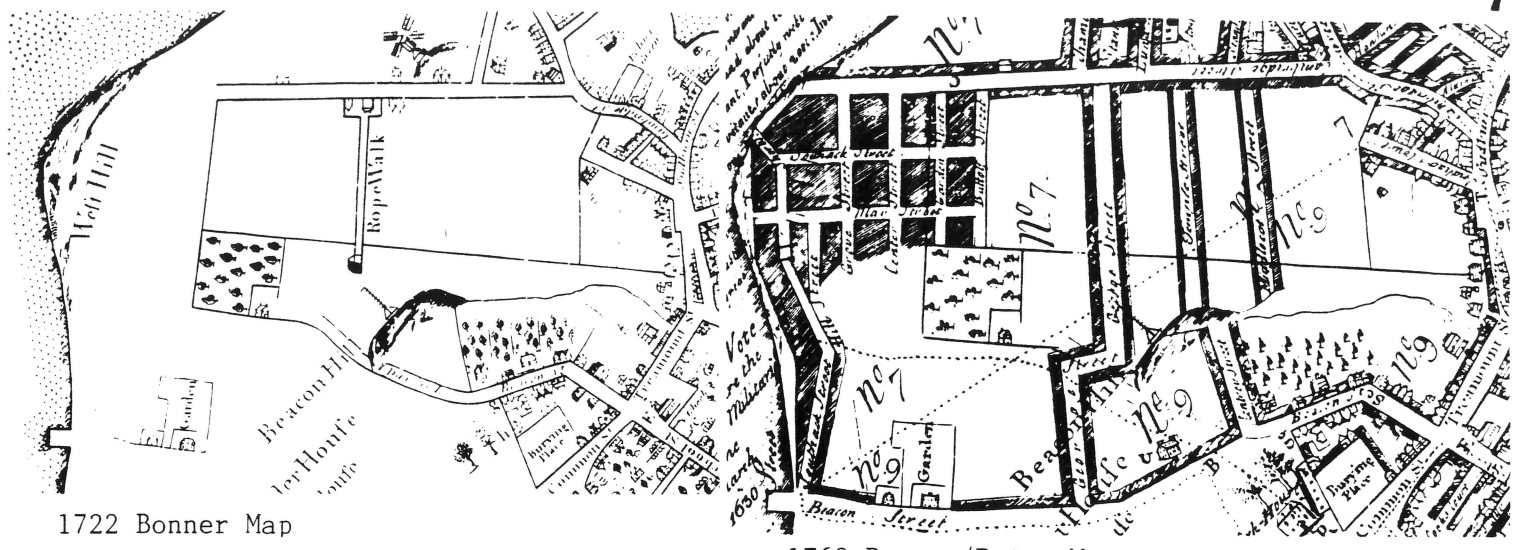
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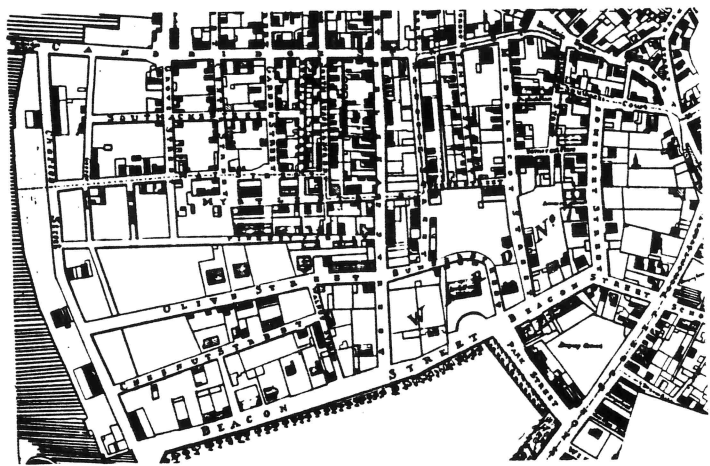
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tour notes prepared by Leslie Larson, past president, New England Chapter, SAH
March 1990

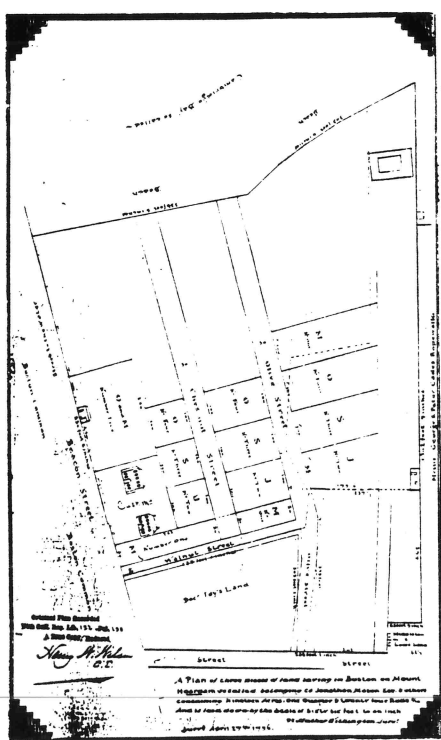


1722 Bonner Map

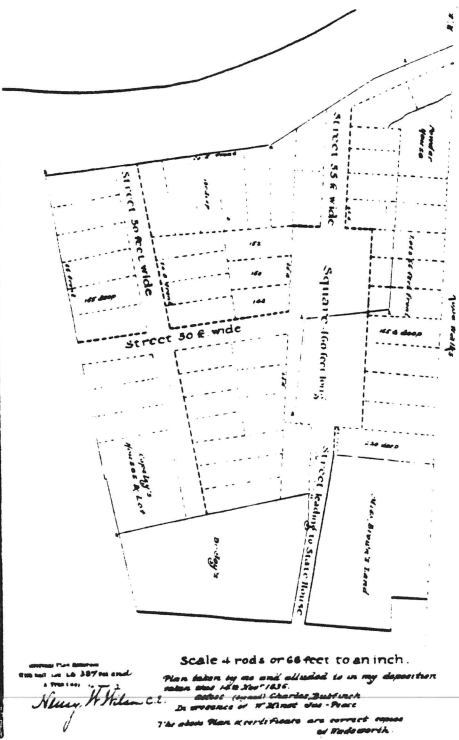
1769 Bonner/Price Map



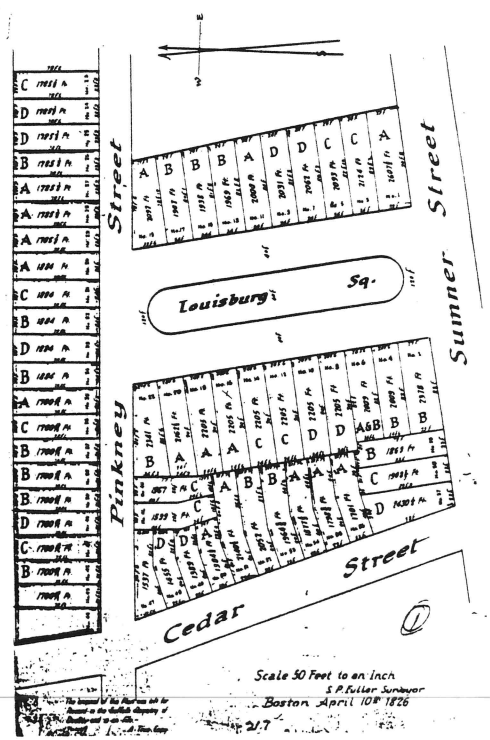
1814 Hales Map



1796 Withington Plan
Mt. Vernon Proprietors



1796 Bulfinch Plan
(abandoned)



1826 Fuller Plan
Louisburg Square